

End Up Here by orphan_account

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Summary:

"Because he knows he doesn't have a right to be this annoyed. Because El is totally allowed to talk to whomever she wants to, and make new friends, and hang out with other people, and expand beyond their friend group. Because he doesn't want to be that guy who gets all weird and possessive about their girlfriend.

Because despite all that, watching her laugh and talk with another guy is still driving him crazy."

or:

Mike sees El talking to another guy in school and jealousy ensues.

End Up Here

“She’s allowed to talk to other guys, you know,” Max says dryly.

“I know,” Mike grumbles. School’s just let out for the week. He’s standing with the Party, sans El, in the Hawkins High hallway. While everyone else is chatting about their plans for the weekend (arcade tournament, followed by a movie night at Mike’s), El is across the hallway, chatting up a storm with some guy from the Junior class.

Mike’s jealousy isn’t subtle in the slightest. He knows he shouldn’t, but he can’t help but throw dirty glances in their direction. The guy — Mike doesn’t know his name, he doesn’t really want to — is El’s English tutor. While El was able to join the Hawkins freshman class this year, she still struggled to keep up in some subjects, hence the tutors. Mike offered to tutor her himself, but El pointed out that they probably wouldn’t get much studying done if they were alone together all the time, and she didn’t want to distract Mike from his own studies.

“Then why do you keep staring?” Max asks, giving Mike a skeptical look.

“Because!” Mike frowns, fidgeting in place.

Because he knows he doesn’t have a right to be this annoyed. Because El is totally allowed to talk to whomever she wants to, and make new friends, and hang out with other people, and expand beyond their friend group. Because he doesn’t want to be that guy who gets all weird and possessive about their girlfriend.

Because despite all that, watching her laugh and talk with another guy is still driving him crazy.

“She’s your girlfriend,” Will reminds Mike, “You don’t have to worry.”

“I’m not worried!” Mike replies a little too quickly. Why would he be worried? It wasn’t like her tutor was older, or cooler, or more attractive, or anything. It wasn’t like Mike sometimes worried that El

would grow tired of him, that she only liked Mike because he was one of the first boys she ever met.

“Dude, you’re totally freaking out,” Dustin snorts.

He really is. Especially when El flips her hair over her shoulder and laughs really hard at something her stupidly cooler, older, attractive tutor said. On the freak-out-o-meter, he’s a solid 10.

“I’m just gonna go check on her!” Mike hastily announces, “You know, just to make sure she’s doing okay.”

“I’m pretty sure she’s fine,” Lucas snorts.

“You guys don’t know that!” Mike insists, “She could be like, freaking out on the inside. What if she doesn’t even want to talk to him, but she doesn’t know how to get out of the conversation? What if she’s trapped? Or like...what if he’s like...using mind control on her, or something?”

“You do realize that you sound completely insane right now, right?” Max counters, raising an eyebrow.

“Like, Will’s-mom-crazy,” Dustin adds.

“Wait, what?” Will snaps, frowning at Dustin.

But Mike doesn’t hear any of this — by the time Will ruefully starts to point out that Dustin’s mom is just as crazy, on account of her ‘crazy cat obsession,’ Mike is already halfway across the hallway.

El is still laughing when Mike approaches the pair. “Mike!” She exclaims in greeting, eyes shining.

“Hey,” Mike says casually, sliding up to stand next to her. He’s totally chill. He’s just checking to make sure she’s okay — he’s not that guy.

“Jason just told me the funniest joke!” El explains.

Jason? What kind of name was Jason anyways? Wasn’t that the killer in the Friday the 13th movies? Obviously, he wasn’t to be trusted.

“Oh?” Mike says noncommittally, sizing up Jason’s wavy blonde hair and sky-blue eyes.

“Tell it again!” El giggles, turning back to Jason.

“Alright, alright,” Jason smiles, and Jesus Christ even his teeth are perfectly white, “What kind of dinosaur knows a lot of synonyms?”

Mike gives him a flat stare. “What kind?”

“The Thesaurus!” Jason replies, and then El loses her shit again. She nearly doubles over with laughter, like that dumb pun is the funniest thing she’s ever heard.

“The Thesaurus!” She giggles, turning to beam at Mike.

Mike forces himself to laugh, but it honestly comes out sounding more like a dry, sarcastic wheeze than anything else.

“Anyway,” Jason says, still smiling, still looking impossibly perfect, “I guess I better get going.”

“Yeah,” Mike replies, eyeing him, “I guess you should.”

“Bye!” El beams, wiping tears of laughter from her eyes.

Jason waves at both of them before walking off, leaving El to turn to a still sour-faced Mike.

“Isn’t he so funny?” El remarks happily.

“Yeah. Hilarious,” Mike mutters.

El’s smile falters as she takes in his gloomy expression. “Is something wrong?”

He’s not that guy. He’s not. El’s allowed to talk to other people, and make new friends that are guys, and Mike really needs to mind his own business, and not say what he really wants to say —

“Do you like him?” Mike blurts out, unable to stop himself.

“What?” El frowns.

“Jason!” Mike glowers, “Do you like him?”

Oh god. He seriously needs to stop talking. But he can't. The words just keep coming out like word vomit, making a huge mess all over the place and making him feel sick and terrible.

“Because you guys seemed pretty friendly,” Mike continues, “Like, too friendly.”

El's eyes narrow, but she doesn't seem angry — it's more like she's confused. Her brow furrows as she stares him down, as if she's studying him, trying to understand.

Mike's words finally come to a faltering halt as El continues to glare at him, and he starts to wonder if he's totally screwed things up. Oh shit, he should have just kept his mouth shut. El's probably going to like, chew him out, or worse. Maybe she's even going to break up with him, because he totally just sounded like a possessive creep and it'd honestly be what he deserved.

Thankfully, none of that happens. Instead, El grabs his arm without warning and pulls him down the hallway. She brings him outside to the back of the school and presses him up against the brick wall, still frowning.

It's a spring day; the air is warm, the breeze is cool, and little flowers have started to bloom amongst the weeds and remaining snow drifts that run against the brick wall. In the distance, he can hear the sounds of school buses preparing to leave the parking lot and the soccer team warming up for practice on the neighboring field.

As Mike stands pressed up against the school wall, El stands in front of him, arms crossed. His growth spurt over the past summer means that she has to crane her head back slightly to meet his eye level, but despite her small stature, she's still incredibly imposing.

“What's wrong?” El demands, “Why are you acting so weird?”

“I-I'm not,” Mike stammers, suddenly feeling shy.

“You are!” El insists.

"I'm not!" Mike contends.

El leans in close to him, eyes still narrowed. "Friends. Don't. Lie."

Shit.

Mike fidgets in place — drumming his leg, glancing side-to-side, basically moving everything except his mouth.

"Tell me!" El demands again, "Why are you upset?"

"I got jealous, okay?" Mike bursts, throwing his hands up in the air in defeat.

El pauses. Her narrow-eyed stare melts into a confused frown as she takes a small step back. "Jealous?"

"Of Jason," Mike explains, rolling his eyes.

El only seems more confused by this. "Why?"

"Because!" Mike says unhelpfully, not looking directly at her, "He's... better than me."

"Better than you?"

"You know!" Mike mumbles, gaze trained on his feet now, "He's... older. And he's cool, and he's good-looking, and he makes you laugh, and...I'm just...me."

As he's still staring at his feet, Mike doesn't see her reaction. He doesn't see the way her face softens, the endearing smile she gives him, nor the affectionate, disbelieving shake of her head. He only sees the loving smile she gives him after she steps forward, cups his cheeks, and raises his head so that their gazes meet.

"You are you," El murmurs, "And that's why I love you."

Mike stares back at her wordlessly. The touch of her fingers is delicate against his cheeks, and as she strokes him softly, he can feel his self-doubts and resentment melt away like the lingering snow drifts.

“You’re my age, so we get to figure things out together,” El tells him soothingly, “You’re my best friend, and you always make me smile. You’re beautiful, and you’re not cool — but I’m not either.”

Mike snorts at that, unable to stop himself from smiling. “You’re cool,” he tells her, “You’re like, the definition of cool.”

“I’m weird,” El rebuffs with a smile, “We’re both weirdos — I have my powers, and you’re a big knucklehead who doesn’t know that their girlfriend loves them.”

Mike feels his cheeks warm as he leans back against the wall. The light spring breeze flutters through his hair, causing it to muss into a disheveled mess. “I love you too,” he mumbles, gaze soft.

“So, stop being a knucklehead, then,” El reiterates, stepping closer to him. Her fingers curl in the front of his sweater, pulling him closer, pressing him into her.

“Sorry,” Mike murmurs, lowering his head, lips now only centimeters from hers.

El gives him one last smile before closing the gap between their parted lips. Their kisses are usually pretty chaste, safe, and gentle, but this one is different. It feels needier somehow, as if they’re both rushing to reassure each other through hasty kisses, hitched breaths, and wandering hands.

As their lips part and the kiss deepens, Mike feels himself slowly letting go, allowing himself to just completely melt against her, because holy shit, he can’t get enough of El.

Because he cares for her more than words can ever fully express. Because he can’t imagine his life without her, and he doesn’t ever want to. Because while he doesn’t want to be that guy, he does want to be someone that’ll always be there for her, whatever she needs, whenever she needs it. Her best friend, her boyfriend, her guy.

Because he loves her, simple and unabashed, forever and always.